SOCIAL DANCING

INCONSISTENT WITH

A CHRISTIAN PROFESSION

AND

BAPTISMAL VOWS:

A Sermon,

[D] IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, COLUMBIA, S. C., JUNE 17, 1849,

BY B. M. PALMER, PASTOR.

Published by request of the Church Session.

COLUMBIA:
PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF THE SOUTH CAROLINIAN.
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PREFACE.

To the Members of the
First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S. C.

BELOVED BRETHREN: The following Discourse, delivered in your hearing a few Sabbaths since, is now submitted to your perusal at the earnest and united request of the Church Session.

I desire here to record publicly my thanksgiving to God that the sentiments herein advanced have met your almost universal approval. Thus have I been saved from my fears; as the Sermon was preached with much weakness and trembling. In this I rejoice the more, as it gives assurance that, so far as vain pleasures are concerned, you will strive in your behaviour to "put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world;" aiming to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world," and "making no provision to the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."

It would have been easy to refer you to much that has been better written on the subject of worldly amusements; especially to a Treatise of one of your former Pastors—the Reverend T. C. HENRY, D. D.—now enjoying his Master's reward in Heaven. But, as the Sermon aims only at a local influence, I have thought that perhaps local and present associations might impart a greater interest to truths uttered by the living voice, than to those which come from unknown and distant pens. It may be proper to add, that, being written from memory some weeks after delivery, the written language may not entirely correspond with the language spoken. You will not fail, however, to recognise it as the Discourse to which you listened; and certainly you will detect no variation in the doctrines advanced. Coming to you without pretensions of literary merit, you will, I know, kindly receive it, as a sample of my humble, though earnest, efforts to build you up in the faith and purity of the Gospel.

That the Truth and Spirit of God may sanctify us more and more—that as Pastor and People we may be accepted in the Day of Accounts, and together be united with "the General Assembly and Church of the First Born which are written in Heaven"—will always be the prayer of,

Dear Brethren, your servant, for Christ's sake,

B. M. PALMER

SERMON.

"They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance."—*Job*, xxi: 11.

These words form a part of Job's graphic description of the irreligious families of his day. They were known by two characteristics: by their superior worldly endowments, and by the levity of their conduct. Receiving their good things in this life, and having no "inheritance among them which are sanctified," why should they be subjected to the severe, protracted and various discipline by which God makes his chosen ones "perfect through suffering?" Accordingly, Job says "their seed is established in their sight, and their offspring before their eyes; their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them."

Their gayety is thus depicted: "They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance: they take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; they spend their days in wealth"—or, as the margin reads, in mirth—"and in a moment go down into the grave." Under the combined influence of the two, they reach to such a pitch of atheism as to "say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: what is the Almighty that we should serve him? And what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" From the connexion of the whole passage it is evident that no strain is put upon the text, when it is adduced to justify the strictures of the pious upon the dance as a recognised social amusement.

You are aware, my hearers, that it has never been my habit to indulge in special criticism of individual vices, nor to frame easy lectures upon the opposite virtues. The Gospel has always seemed to me much more than merely a moral institute; and the pulpit has scarcely appeared to accomplish its high mission, if through its agency men are made virtuous without being made holy. It has therefore been my constant aim to explain and to

enforce the great doctrines of grace; to set before you the Cross of Christ, as at once the motive and the means to evangelical obedience. I have thought that, should these commanding truths be sealed to your conversion and sanctification, their natural fruit would be found in a consistent Christian life—that should God and his service be once enthroned in your affections, your spiritual instincts would conduct you safely through many of the temptations and snares which surround you. It may nevertheless happen that the bias of an unequal religious education, or the corrupting influence of society, may lead some into particular errors both of doctrine and practice; in which case it becomes imperative upon me, as one set for the defence of the truth, to subject these errors to the most searching analysis which the tests given us in Scriptnre will allow. I propose at this time to examine what claims social dancing has upon the regards, or even the forbearance, of those who profess to be the people of God. If any among you have been accustomed to consider it an innocent amusement, in which your children may safely be indulged, I solicit your earnest attention to the principles I shall endeavour to set forth, together with a candid and conscientious review of the opinions you have heretofore held. I shall address myself to *you*, my brethren, who have been "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers," showing cause why you should not lend encouragement in any form to this most paltry of all the vanities even of this vain world.

To deal fairly with this subject, the arguments both *for* and *against* the dance should be carefully weighed; into this form, therefore, our present investigation will be thrown. The first position taken by the advocates of dancing, is, *that the Bible speaks of it without condemnation or even censure;* consequently to oppose it with ecclesiastical penalties is a breach of the great Protestant principle, which makes the Bible the only rule of faith and practice, and is, moreover, an unwarrantable invasion of Christian liberty. I am glad that the appeal is so openly made to the Scriptures. Yet before consulting the inspired Oracle, let it be remembered that its decisions are final; and that we are guilty of profaneness in making this appeal, if it be not the solemn purpose of our hearts to abide by the response given, submitting our opinions and our conduct to its direction.

Dancing is referred to in seventeen places in the Bible; not including, however, the parallel passages. In eight instances the dance is clearly assumed to be *a religious rite*, practised in the worship of the true God or of Pagan Deities. In Ex. 15: 20, Miriam, the Prophetess, and her company of women, respond to the Song of Moses and the Children of Israel upon the destruction of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea: "And Miriam, the Prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." In Ex. 32: 19, the dancing of the Israelites in worship of the Golden Calf is described: "And it came to pass that as soon as Moses came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing." In Judges 21: 19, 21, there is a record of an annual religious festival celebrated with the dance in Shiloh, which gave opportunity to the Benjamites to obtain by violence the wives which the other tribes had sworn not to give them voluntarily: "Then they said, behold there is a feast of the Lord in Shiloh yearly." * * * "And see and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyard and catch you every man his wife." In 2 Sam. 6: 14, we have the account of David dancing before the Ark of the Lord, on its passage from the House of Obed-edom to the Tabernacle: "And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod." In Psalm 149: 3, and Psalm 150: 4, dancing is associated with the worship of God: "Let them praise His name in the dance;" and again, "Praise Him with the timbrel and dance." In Lam. 5: 15, the cessation of the dance is indicative of spiritual grief: "The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning." And in Ps. 30: 11, the reverse of this language is employed to denote the recurrence of religious joy: "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing." Finally, in Jer. 31: 4, spiritual blessings are promised to captive Israel, and these are associated with the dance as a proper expression of pious joy: "I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry." This language is employed, too, in the chapter in which God promises by his Prophet to make a new Covenant with His people, "putting his law in their inward parts, and writing it in their hearts," which the Apostle, in the 8th chapter of Hebrews, so beautifully expounds

of the Christian dispensation. It is perfectly obvious that none of these passages of Scripture, which describe dancing as an act of religious worship, can be pleaded in support of dancing as a social amusement.

But let us sift through the testimony which the Bible gives on this subject. In four other passages the dance is simply commemorative of some great victory or national festival, calling for unusual expressions of public delight. In Judges 11: 34, Jephtha, returning from his victory over the Ammonites, recoils from his rash vow when his daughter came forth to greet him: "And Jephtha came to Mizpeh unto his house, and behold his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances." In 1 Sam. 18: 6, David is welcomed after the death of Goliah by the maidens of Israel: "It came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing." In 1 Sam. 30: 16, is recorded David's easy victory over the Amalekites, as they dance over the spoil they had taken: "And when he had brought him down, behold they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking and dancing." The dance recorded in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15: 25, comes nearer to the social amusement recognised among ourselves than any which has been mentioned. Yet it is evident from the surprise of the elder brother, and from the plea used by the father in his own justification, that this was a rare festival; and though confined to the domestic circle, is far more allied to the national and public festivities than to the ordinary social intercourse of life.*

Ecclesiastes 3: 4—"there is a time to dance"—has often been cited as a scriptural endorsement of this amusement. Yet the entire context shows that the Wise Man utters no deliverance either for or against dancing in particular; but uses the term metaphorically, and designs to teach that all our times and seasons, joys and sorrows, all events in the history of individuals and of nations, are under the immediate control of Divine Providence. If the fact that men are suffered by God to dance be

* A prominent difference appears also in the persons who perform the dance. Trench, in his Notes on the Parables, p. 324, says "it would be alien to the feelings and manners of the East, to suppose the guests themselves to have been engaged in these diversions; they would be but listeners and spectators: the singers and dancers being hired for such occasions."

construed into a mark of his approval, then consistency will require us equally to justify both hatred and war; because in the same connexion it is added, "a time to hate and a time of war." In the same figurative sense the word occurs in Mat. 11: 17, "We have piped unto you and you have not danced." Besides that this is spoken of childish sports in the market, it is only an illustration of the perverseness of the Jewish people, drawn from the waywardness of children, and couched in metaphor.

It is needless to comment upon the dance of Herodias's daughter before Herod, Mat. 14: 6, since the vicious character of all the parties concerned, and the detestable crime to which this dance led, are sufficient guarantee that it will not be pressed into service as a justifying precedent.

Without entering into tedious criticism of these passages singly, it will be enough to generalize the five following conclusions: 1. That the dances mentioned in Scriptnre were either religious acts, or else the unfrequent expressions of exuberant joy upon great national occasions; devotional feeling in the one case, and the rare occurrence of opportunities in the other, checking that tendency to dissipation and revelry which characterizes the dance as an ordinary social amusement. 2. That the only two instances—that of the text and the dance of Herodias's daughter—in which it is perverted to the latter use are mentioned with any thing but approbation. 3. That these dances were performed in the open fields, and in the broad light of day; essentially differencing them from the nightly assemblages known amongst us, and serving as a restraint upon excess and riot. 4. That these dances were extemporaneous and unpremeditated; whereas with us it is reduced to a science, and taught as an art to children and youth. 5. And what will appear of great consequence in the sequel, there is no hint given of promiscuous dancing between the sexes; it being practised by one sex to the exclusion of the other. Without pausing then to debate whether the absence of censure in Scriptnre is in every case to be construed as a sentence of approval, and allowing these passages to be adduced as endorsing the propriety of the dances they record, still the difference between these and the modern social dance is so obvious and so material, that the argument from the one to the other miserably fails. A complete identity between them in character and design must be established, or the reasoning which justifies the one by the other is wholly inconsequential.

In passing to the second argument in favour of dancing, I confess to a sense of humiliation in letting down the dignity of the pulpit to the level of its insignificance. Very few words, however, will convey all that the necessity of the argument requires: *it is, that the art of dancing promotes grace of carriage, while the physical exercise conduces to health.* As to the latter point, whether the lazy and luxurious motion of the modern dancer may be dignified with the name of exercise, depends entirely upon the extent to which it may be proper to carry a figure of speech; and whether the complete inversion of day and night practised among the fashionable, and the sudden transition from a heated ball room to the cool air of night, contribute to health, may perhaps be determined without the intervention of the medical faculty. In relation to the grace acquired through dancing, I fear I must be content to be thought a barbarian by the polite. It was wittily observed by a minister of the Gospel, not long since removed by death, that "whether dancing made men *graceful* he would not decide; one thing was certain, however, it made them *graceless*." If I shall succeed in showing hereafter that the moral results of dancing are only injurious, all temporal benefits arising from it must be willingly foregone, by Christians at least. Yet I confess myself wholly skeptical whether this elegance of carriage be ever acquired through the magic of the dance. It has occurred to me to observe with care, and for a long time, the manners of men with relation to this thing; and, so far as I can judge, persons who move in the same circle of society have about the same general polish, whether they have been trained in the saloon or not. The simple truth is, that ease and elegance of deportment are not acquired at once, nor in formal lessons, as science is mastered. We insensibly catch the tone and complexion of the society around us, as plants get their coloring from the light of heaven by absorption. If, during the plastic period of youth, we are placed in contact with models of elegance and grace, these impress themselves upon us, and we learn to be graceful by the same gradual and imperceptible process through which an infant learns to see. In point of taste, it has always seemed curious to me, if dancing really confers upon the carriage this beautiful propriety, that instruction in so elegant a branch should be generally committed to a class of vagrants, who have for the most part been gradnated in the pot houses and kitchens of Paris—a class of men to whom, while made sub-

servient to your pleasures, you never assign the station nor award the respect spontaneously given to all other instructors of youth; and a class of men whose low birth and ill-breeding, to say nothing of a loose morality, render them unfit to be entrusted with the education even of the heels of Christian children.

In the third place, it is argued *that dancing is not wrong in the abstract.* Granted; but what if it be wrong in the concrete? It is not sinful "*per se*;" but what if it be sinful in its inseparable adjuncts? The fallacy is so transparent here, the only wonder is that it should ever deceive; nor would it upon any but a moral question, in regard to which we wish to be deceived. It may be affirmed of all corporeal actions, that, in themselves considered, or in the abstract, they are wholly indifferent and devoid of moral character. We may attach very little importance to the plucking and eating of an apple; yet the apple which Adam eat in Paradise, contrary to the command of God, "brought death into the world and all our woe." There is no sin in the mere act of swallowing a glass of brandy; yet if "the thief put into the mouth steals away my brains," the abstract is soon changed into the concrete. Nay, more: if this subtle drink should not imbrute *me*, yet if my indulgence causes a weak brother to stumble, this indifferent action assumes the form of a high misdemeanor. A cruel disregard of the sins and frailties of our fellow-men imparts a turpitude to acts otherwise incapable either of praise or blame. It was an apostolic precept, "whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience' sake:" yet the same inspired teacher adds, "if any man say unto you this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not, for his sake that showed it and for conscience' sake;" the same reason being assigned both for the permission and for the prohibition—"for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Nothing so indifferent in itself as the eating of meat, "for meat commendeth us not to God;" yet the eating of meat under certain circumstances exhibits a criminal disregard of the welfare of men and of the honour of God. It is just the difference between the abstract and the concrete. Further: the very same action will assume three distinct characters, according as it is interpreted by the "*quo animo*," which it is the business of courts of justice to ascertain. I discharge a loaded weapon, and a fellow being falls prostrate in death: if the discharge was prompted

by malice, and with intent to kill, I am hung by the neck as a murderer; if the discharge be accidental, the law adjudges it simply a homicide, and I receive the condolence of friends in this singular affliction; if, again, the fatal blow destroys the invader of my dwelling or of my country, I receive the congratulations of all good citizens and patriots. The outward corporeal action has no significancy, save as an index of the *animus* or disposition of the doer Upon this principle all legal investigations are conducted, and all judicial decisions are rendered. Now, if it shall appear that dancing tends to induce pernicious evils to mankind in their relations to society, and still more in their relations to God, and if it be the index of a light and pleasure-loving spirit, wholly inconsistent with supreme devotion to God, in these cases the harmlessness of dancing in the abstract will not bar the impeachment and condemnation of it in the concrete. I will not here anticipate remarks which will be more appropriately introduced in another connexion. Suffice it to say, that no accuser has yet arisen so silly as to criminate the mere "bodily exercise" of dancing. In this regard it is surely as innocent as the motion of the body in walking, jumping, or running. It is against the dance as a recognised social pleasnre, with all its adjuncts of large assemblies, levity, dissipation, revelry, forgetfulness of God and duty, that the Church in every age has levelled its censures and pointed its warnings. To plead therefore the abstract innocence of the mere corporeal motion in dancing is a shameful evasion of the only issue which is made.

But the final argument in favour of dancing, and the one upon which the greatest number of its advocates rely, is, *that the young must have amusements;* and that to array religion in hostility to their pleasures is only to invest it with an austerity peculiarly repulsive.* I fear that this reason will be found to involve a principle fundamentally false and dangerous, viz: that

* A recent writer—who has been cleverly reviewed in the 4th No. of the 2d v. of the Southern Presbyterian Review—undertakes to show that the whole policy of the Church is wrong in relation to worldly amusements. In his opinion, the withdrawal of Christian people from the theatre, the opera, and the ball-room, has removed the influence by which they might have been rendered comparatively harmless. The true policy of the Church, he argues, is not to surrender these pleasures to the frivolous and gay, to receive their tone from them; but to take them under her own patronage, and to exercise that restraint which shall secure them from the excesses now justly chargeable upon them.

it is youth's prerogative to take reprisals beforehand of all anticipated care, by making enjoyment the great object of pursuit. There is no period in the life of man when he is permitted to make his own gratification the end of his existence. He is placed in most solemn relations to God, and, under God, to his fellow-men; and he must be engaged either in the immediate discharge of, or else in diligent preparation for, the duties which flow out of them. God and duty, self and pleasure, are the mottoes of two different and opposing systems, which may be baptized with the names of Religion and Atheism. This then is precisely the issue I join with the argument above stated in defence of dancing—it is the seed of atheism sown by Christian hands in the breasts of our youth; the atheism too of the Epicurean school, which sensualizes while it destroys. If there must be atheism in the land, let it be of that sturdy and masculine sort which grapples, through the reason, with the majesty and supremacy of God; but let not our children succumb to that ignoble and cowardly atheism which sneaks into the heart through the lusts of the senses.

The moral doctrine of Epicurus was, that man's supreme good consisted in pleasure; yet he little intended this axiom to charter the systems of licentiousness which have taken shelter under his name. Of himself it is recorded that "he lived in an exemplary manner, and conformably to the rules of philosophical wisdom and frugality." His doctrine, I will not say with some, was liable to abuse, but rather that it was essentially vicious. The nature of the pleasures in which man's supreme good must be found will of course be determined in different cases by the individual bent. The happiness of philosophers will doubtless reside in the pure pleasures of the mind, while among the uncultivated masses it will kennel in the grossest sensuality and vice. Epicureanism made man his own god, and self-pleasing his controlling law; and the result has been, that notwithstanding the purity of its founder, it has always been the synonyme of all that is debased in practice and atheistic in principle. And the only difference which I can discover between the Epicureanism of the Athenian school and that which I am now combating, consists in the length of time allotted for its ascendency. Among the ancients, man's prerogative to be a law unto himself remained unimpaired throughout life; among us, only until, like a tamed bullock, his neck shall be galled with the yoke of care.

But the same disastrous consequences must attend the doctrine in either case. We may enjoin moderation in pleasure as necessary to the perpetuation of pleasure—Epicurus did the same; we may discriminate between the refined pleasures of virtue and the gross pleasures of vice—Epicurus did the same; but after all, our youth will determine for themselves both the kind and the degree of pleasures in which their happiness is to be found; and the broad principle inculcated will be construed as the patent for every indulgence they may crave. Let Christian parents beware how they inoculate their children with the virus of infidelity. Do not wonder, when you have emancipated them from God's law, if they assume to be free from your own. Be not astonished, when you have planted so carefully the seed of rebellion, if you are forced yourselves to eat the bitter berries. "Sow the wind," and you shall surely "reap the whirlwind." I deny then that in youth, any more than in mature age, it is lawful to live unto ourselves. In all the stages of our career, we are to recognise solemn and binding duties; and upon all alike it must be impressed, that "she who liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

But, it will be asked, does this rigid Puritanism allow no relaxation? Must the soul of man never enjoy the poor privilege of the archer's bow, that of being sometimes relieved from the tension of duty? Unquestionably it may. But are there no pleasures, both grateful and bracing, strengthening while they refresh, that we must resort to the dance, the most brainless amusement under heaven? Let us not so impeach a bountiful Providence, whose open hand has sown blessings and comforts in all the thickets of care. The cooling fountains of water, which bubble up under our feet in merciful profusion on every hill side, refresh the fainting spirit more than all the wine presses of Madeira. In like manner, the unrestrained communion and the healthful sports of childhood have a relish in them, in comparison with which all the forced and precocious pleasures of the drawing-room appear sickly and tame. And when, in opening manhood, the young begin to court society, and to feel the buddings of sentiment and tenderness which are to sweeten life to its last drop, is there no intercourse for them around the fireside—no room for the heart to play in the social visit paid to friends and neighbors? Are there no kindly gatherings overlooked by the eye of parental love, and over which even religion may

throw its sacred protection? Must these be all jostled out of place to make room for the crowded assembly, the masquerade, and the dance? Must the young mope to death, unless they find refuge in boisterous mirth—in a babel of confused sounds—among noisy revellers, whose hearts and brains alike have slipped down to heel? Without expanding, however, this principle will be admitted to be sound: the diversions of the young—and in nothing is the wisdom of a pious parent more heavily taxed than in providing these—should be selected from that class which entertain only so long as they are needful for the purpose of relaxation. There are wholesome pleasures, which, like wholesome food, are never craved but when it is proper to enjoy them. And there are pleasures which intoxicate and madden, set the blood on flame, and consume while they delight. The dance is of this latter kind—it fascinates with a peculiar charm, and hurries its votaries along with a wild delirium, too much intoxicated to perform the sober duties of life, and too far maddened to heed the warnings prophetic of their speedy ruin.

It is time now to put the weights into the other scale. I will reduce all that I have to say against social dancing among Christians under three heads.

1. *It is inconsistent with that separation from the world which is involved in a profession of religion.* The history of the Church abundantly shows that she can more safely abide the ordeal of persecution than of prosperity. The days have been when the world was anxious to draw the line of demarcation between itself and the Church. All men were compelled to the unambiguous choice between the two. Then a profession of religion was seldom made before the cost was counted; the sacrifices made to enter the Church were but the earnests of sacrifices cheerfully rendered as soon as they were demanded. The Church, compact and homologous by pressure from without, exerted, through her separation, a tenfold greater influence than in after times when her numbers were quintupled. But now that religion has become respectable in the eyes of the ungodly, and Christianity has installed herself in the high places of wealth and power, the world is just as anxious to blot out the separating line as she was once to make it indelible. The Church is lost if she is drawn into the treacherous amalgamation. Yet, alas! while the profession of religion is more common, the character of that which is professed is far more superficial than it

once was. How many assume the solemn obligations of Church members under transient emotions, without any abiding conviction of the sins they profess to abandon, or real love for the service to which they addict themselves! The covetous love of gain—the ambitious love of applause—coldness in religious duties—worldly-mindedness—levity—much of these may be mourned over; but, being to a great extent covert, they cannot be corrected by men except through moral and persuasive means. But, in regard to pleasures, the line may perhaps be more visibly drawn. It is true that minute precepts are not given to guide us in the particular selection of amusements. The method which God pursues is better adapted to form and strengthen the character of his saints; the Holy Ghost implants right affections in the heart, which are to guide with the unerring truthfulness of spiritual instincts, and prescribes general principles, which are to be gathered from the Scriptures and applied at discretion. However difficult it may be *in thesi* to draw the line between the lawful and unlawful pleasures of the Christian, with the heart right towards God, and with a conscience informed by the Divine Word, it can never be difficult in practice. But I propose no hair-split distinctions—there is one principle, obvious and tangible, which resolves perfectly the point before us. If there are pleasures which the world, alienated from God, has stamped and chosen as its own; pleasures which peculiarly express the vanity and darkness of the natural mind; pleasures which bind men as ungodly together in fellowship and sympathy—from these pleasures professing Christians must wholly abstain, if they would "keep their garments unspotted from the world." Now the dance, the opera, the theatre, the race course, *et id omne genus*, fall exactly into this category. They have been appropriated by "the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," as their peculiar portion—they bear the stamp of the mint in which they have been coined—they are acknowledged badges of a worldly profession, and, in some sort, sacraments of allegiance to the Prince of the power of the air. We just as naturally infer that one who mingles in them is worldly in his tastes and pursuits, as that one who goes to the Lord's Table is a professed follower of Jesus. In this aspect of the case, then, however perplexed we may be in framing a general and positive rule, which shall discriminate all the lawful amusements of the Christian, we have no difficulty in reaching a negative

decision upon the dance and the pleasures cognate with it. Brethren, "I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils; ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of devils."

Indeed this matter may be brought home to the conscience. In joiniug ourselves to the visible Church, do we profess to have come out from the world and to be a peculiar people? What separation any more remains to us when we have banded with the world in the enjoyment of its vanities? Do we profess to be "strangers and pilgrims upon earth, seekiug a better country, even a heavenly?" How does this comport with our "lusting after the flesh pots of Egypt?" Do we profess to groan over the remains of indwelling sin, and to sigh after greater holiness of heart? What consternation would be produced if, amid the evolutions of the dance, we should express this in the pregnant utterance of Paul, "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and would not the reply come to us from a chorus of voices, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Do we profess to fear the temptations of the devil? How does this consist with following Satau into his own haunts that we may tempt him? Do we profess to be in travail of soul for the salvation of impenitent men? Suppose that we speak to a partner in the dance, warning faithfully of the wrath to come; is it he, or is it conscience, that rebukes our profaneness? Do we testify to the world the pleasures of a good conscience and the joy of communion with God? What is that testimony worth when contradicted by our testimony for the pleasures of frivolous mirth? But above all, do we profess to be the followers of Him, whose style and title on earth was "the Man of Sorrows?" Do we profess to "bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus;" and have we been to the communion table expressly to remember Him in his death, and to have fellowship with him in his sufferings? Oh! tell it not out to earth, lest it rend again the very rocks and break once more the slumbers of the dead—A DANCING DISCIPLE OF A CRUCIFIED REDEEMER!!* A

* One of the fathers of the Presbyterian Church in Virginia—I have the anecdote from the lips of one who heard it related by Dr. Rice—was once grieved by a dance which occurred just on the eve of a sacramental occasion. He took no notice of it, however, till the Sabbath; in the action-sermon, while describing the passion of our blessed Lord, and when the sympathies of his hearers were fully

holy prudence, I know, must be used in drawing out religious truth to the notice of the ungodly. Yet the Christian has no call to be in any assembly, when his simple presence there effectually closes his lips and seals up the testimony, which, as God's witness, he should never be disabled from uttering.

But it will be urged that this inconsistency on the part of actual professors is not pleaded for—the privilege of the dance is only claimed for the young who are not professors. This brings me to the second topic I propose to discuss:

2. *The baptized children of the Church cannot be indulged in dancing consistently with baptismal vows.* Much that has been already said will apply here. In brief, then, what are these vows? In baptism we give our children to God, and invoke upon them His dreadful name; can we consecrate them anew upon the high altars of the world? In baptism we recognise the covenant which binds families to him who is the author of our redemption; and in token of this, its broad seal is placed upon the foreheads of our offspring; can we rescind the solemn stipulations of that covenant, and absolve our children from the duties which it imposes? In baptism, as the sureties of our children, we profess faith in the promises of God, and, in their behalf, confess the sinful nature which they inherit through us; do these confessions and this faith consist with a purpose to allow them wilfully to sin, any more than our confessions for ourselves comport with purposes to sin on our own part? In baptism we forswear for them the pomps and vanities of the world; can we then bind them in apprenticeship to these vanities even for a season? In baptism we promise to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; has the Lord recorded His name in the dancing saloon, there to bless with his converting and sanctifying grace? Let this, too, be brought to the test of conscience. Since the world began, did ever a pious mother cheerfully deck her daughter for the dance, give her parting benediction, and then retire with God to wrestle for her salvation? I would prevail with the favourers of dancing to try for once this practical experiment. Adorn your little ones for the

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drawn forth, he abruptly paused, and, throwing up his hands, exclaimed, in the words I have appropriated above, a dancing disciple of the crucified Redeemer! The effect was electrical, and the dancing spirit quailed before the cross of Christ. May the Holy Ghost give the same energy to the words uttered again, and now written probably for the first time.

gay assembly; and, while they are in the midst of their revelry, shut yourselves in to agonizing intercessions for their speedy conversion. You will not command a tear, nor a sigh, nor a groan; your heart will be as dry as dust, and the petition will congeal upon your freezing lips.

Indeed, so deeply impressed is my own mind with the inconsistency of dancing with baptismal obligations, I hesitate not to utter my mature conviction, that members of the Church who consent to the dancing of their children are perfectly amenable to the discipline of God's house, on the ground of their breach of vows. And if at any time (which I am rejoiced to say is not now the case) I should be unfortunately associated with a Church Session disposed to tolerate the dance, after full and sufficient efforts to reclaim the Church by persuasion and argument, I would assume the responsibility, as a Christian minister, to refuse baptism to the children of such parents as might be found impracticable. I am fully aware that this decision would lead inevitably to the dissolution of the pastoral relation; as the constitution of the Church does not lodge the power of receiving or rejecting members in the hands of the Pastor alone, independently of the Session. I am aware that Church members, who are in good and regular standing, have the right to present their children for baptism, and to insist upon its administration; yet no conscientious minister, entertaining my views, would falter a moment in his choice; and he would perhaps come to the resignation of his charge in the way I have indicated for several reasons: that the disorders of the Church might be brought before the appellate Church courts in such a form as to require their prompt action; that the guilt of separating from his charge might not rest upon his conscience, but upon those who refuse to walk uprightly before God; and that, if he be sacrificed to preserve the unity of the Church, he may be found at his post doing his duty to the cause he has espoused, and bearing his testimony against prevailing abominations. At any rate, my Brethren, the Pastor has his own soul to care for as well as the souls of his people. And if he looks upon this violation of baptismal vows as substantial perjury, however through ignorance it may be committed, can he be the partaker of this sin of others? No! no! rather let him "shake off the dust from his feet," and "turn to the Gentiles," than thus soil his own conscience. Shall he, whose business it is to expound

the doctrine of the Coveuant and of its seals, lend his agency to convert this most solemn and significant institute of baptism into an idle ceremony which means nothing? Shall he profane his office by turning the very sacrament of the Church into a foolish and wicked farce, only fit to provoke the ridicule of the ungodly? Shall he consent that the Lord's people prevaricate at the very altar, and that too in the most stringent oaths mortal man can ever assume? Rather let him keep "a conscience void of offence toward God," and be "a sweet savour of Christ in them that perish," no less than "in them that are saved."

I come now to the last position, from which some of you will probably recoil:

3. *That promiscuous dancing between the sexes is essentially voluptuous and demoralizing.* We are creatures of appetite as well as of reason; as truly flesh and blood as soul and spirit. The sinfulness of our nature shows itself as much by the ascendency of our carnal lusts as by the more spiritual sins of pride and skepticism. However it may detract from the dignity of our nature, the truth is that constant vigilance is required to preserve us from a base subjection to our sensitive appetites; and no small part of virtue consists in the due regulation of these. In the necessary business of life the danger must be incurred of having our lusts excited; this, however, may be only a part of our spiritual conflict and probation on earth. But there is no such stock of virtue in the world that we may unnecessarily expose it to fierce temptations.* If certain popular diversions naturally tend to inflame affections which should be suppressed, how can we but expose the danger? Upon this point I do not wish to be misunderstood: I am far from alleging that all who participate in the dance are occupied with improper associations and feelings. I bring no "railing accusations" against any—it is God's prerogative to read and judge the heart. Nay, I am glad to believe that very many persons dance, whose purity of thought would instantly repel every unworthy sentiment, so soon as conscious of it. But I do allege that promiscuous dancing

* In proof of this, let any one consider the licentious publications which insinuate themselves, like the frogs of Egypt, into our houses and bed chambers, and which are sometimes traced by eyes we should think too pure to look with complacency upon such pollution. A shocking illustration of the same thing has recently been furnished by that troupe of artists who made their shameful, yet patronized, exhibitions in the towns and cities of this country, until the moral sentiment of the good rose up every where and abated the nuisance.

inherently tends to suggest ideas utterly inconsistent with that integrity of soul, which alone deserves to be called virtue in any high sense. Nor is it a sufficient answer to say that multitudes dance who are never conscious of any improper associations. It might not be safe for many, whose character is above suspicion, even to themselves to make too nice an analysis of the pleasure they experience in the dance. Perhaps numbers who talk in rapture of the perfect innocence of this diversion would turn away with a shudder if they should discover (what is apparent to many) a refined sensualism hiding its glossy form amid these blandishments; or would dash the bowl from their lips if they could detect, by any moral tests, the residuum of carnality lurking at the bottom. Our feelings of delight are marvellously mixed in this life. Doubtless the multitudes who thronged to admire the exquisite sculpture of Powers, the Greek Slave, as it turned slowly upon its pivot before them, flattered themselves that no other sentiment existed in their minds but that of admiration for a beautiful art; while underlying this, in the case of most, was the delight of feeding a sensuality which was not revolting, simply because it was unconsciously indulged.

If the dance has no vicious tendencies, how does it happen that it uniformly and speedily degenerates, so soon as the moral sentiment slackens which presses from without? How comes it that, even in communities where the Gospel lifts its voice, and therefore virtue has a sure abode, the waltz so extensively prevails? a species of dance I do not hesitate thus publicly to denounce as undisguisedly licentious. The liberties, too, taken in the dance are such as can hardly be safe, even when sanctioned by the sacred laws of kindred and of tender friendship. And it seems strange to us that a freedom, which, if indulged in ordinary intercourse, would be chastised as impertinence, should be allowed in the public assembly, and even to perfect strangers. Take human nature as it is, fallen and depraved, and subject to the domination of wicked passions, and judge ye whether the concomitants of the dance are not as dangerous to it as the smoking brand to a magazine of powder. The ball-room dress, not generally such as a severe taste would approve—the electric touch of the hand—the fascination of the eye—the excitement of physical motion—the gay confusion of sounds—the bewildering glare of light, act powerfully upon the senses, and occasion a vague and wild delight, into the source of which there is little

opportunity to examine. What aggravates the evil still more, is, that the persons who are chiefly subjected to this severe ordeal are the least able to abide it. At no period of life is it so difficult to stem the current of appetite, as when the passions begin to develope, and, in all the freshness of novelty, fill the mind with images of pleasure. The young are the very last who should be surrendered to such a trial. It is just the season when sense and appetite enter the lists against reason and principle—just the seasou when the lusts of the heart rise up from their lair, hungry as young lions, and the judgment is untrained by experience—just the season when the die is cast for life—and just the season when every evil thought leaves a stain upon the soul indelible forever In short, if the dance has not worked out its worst results amongst us, it is because Christianity will not close her jealous eye nor hush her warning voice. Let these Bibles be closed—these pulpits be silent—the voice of weeping intercession, now heard between the porch and the altar, be stifled—let no banner be lifted up by the Spirit of the Lord—and the tide of profligacy and vice will sweep on, until religion and common morals shall go down together beneath their gloomy waves.

In bringing this discourse to a close, I trust, my Brethren, you will do me the justice to believe that it has not been easy for me to say all that I have uttered. But we are hurrying to the Judgment Bar, and there is no time for soft and honeyed phrases, when your souls and the souls of your children are at stake. Endeared as my relations are to you, I would cheerfully close this Bible never again to open it, and, like the Spartan law-giver, go into perpetual exile from this pulpit, if this step would stamp these instructions ineffaceably upon your hearts. There is no curse with which a righteous God can afflict this apostate earth equal to that of an unconverted, unsanctified, pleasure-loving Church. Better that the plough of desecration should turn up the bones of our common dead in that graveyard—better that the whirlwind of God's anger should destroy this temple, in which you and your fathers have worshipped—better that blasting and mildew should make this consecrated spot a terrible monument of the divine displeasure—better that we should now be summoned, as we sit together on these seats, to meet at once our last account—than that we should live a cold, dead Church, sending forth our blighting influence upon

the ungodly around us. Remember, an important part of our testimony is the witness we bear for experimental religion. Let not Pastor, Elders, and people, enter into an unholy conspiracy to betray Christ through his cause. Let us "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Let us "walk honestly as in the day; not in chambering and wantonness, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in strife and envying." "Let us make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof;" but rather let us "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts;" "looking for and hasting unto the day of God, when the Son of Man shall be revealed to be glorified in his Saints." And to "as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."